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ABSTRACT

Exploration of a number of essays published recently in "Political Science and Perspectives on Politics" makes clear that a number of political scientists consider the question of how they are helping students to become engaged and responsible students is a central goal. The task of working with students in class to help them develop the motivation and skills necessary for engaged citizenship seems a somewhat peripheral professional goal. This paper suggests that political science teachers need to be concerned with creating classroom environments that ask students to articulate and defend their perspectives in dialogue with their peers or the authors whose work is assigned in class. The educator/author of the paper states that her work with oral communication in her government classes has grown out of collaboration and work with scholars in the fields of rhetoric and speech communication. The paper discusses the development of a course on the communication environment and pedagogy and a course on the politics of family. The goals, assignments, and other efforts resulted in a course called "The Politics of Family in America." It offers considerations of the courses and addresses goals for the future. Includes 28 notes. (BT)

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# *Deliberative Discourse in the Political Science Classroom*

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## *Deliberative Discourse in the Political Science Classroom*[1]

As a number of political theorists have explored in detail, democratic citizens are made, not born. To rely on institutions within civil society to model the skills necessary for democracy is likely, Will Kymlicka notes, to fail to provide the development that a thriving democratic community, particularly one that is multicultural, requires. Thus, as Kymlicka notes, "schools must teach children how to engage in the kind of critical reasoning and moral perspective that defines public reasonableness."[2] Although we might hope that the instruction and sufficient practice in skills necessary for public deliberation is central to the tasks of middle schools and high schools, there is significant evidence that such instruction in citizenship virtues has lost its centrality to schooling in the United States. [3] Rather, schooling has come to focus on preparing students not to be citizens, but to be employees. Further, although Gutmann recommends that schooling be improved at the earlier ages particularly to teach character traits, she suggests that higher education has something important to contribute: "While not a substitute for character training, learning how to think carefully and critically about political problems, to articulate one's views and defend them before people with whom one disagrees is a form of moral education to which young adults are more receptive and to which universities are well-suited."[4]

Clearly the political science classroom is an important site of such learning. Exploring a number of essays published recently in PS and Perspectives on Politics, makes it clear that a number of political scientists consider the question of how we are helping students to become engaged and responsible students central, although as Robert Putnam noted in his Presidential Address, the concern with "serving the public, including disseminating research and preparing citizens to be effective citizens" is the last on APSA Strategic Planning Committee's list of association goals.[5] Further, the single statement in the list specifically about our role as teachers advocates, "Promoting high quality teaching and education *about* politics."[6] Thus, the task of working with the students in our classrooms to help them develop the motivation and skills necessary for engaged citizenship seems a somewhat peripheral professional goal. Speaking specifically about the need to better motivate students to be engaged in politics, Scott Keeter notes that, consistent with its goals, the discipline has been much more concerned with teaching students about politics than in motivating them (or in general, understanding how to motivate young people

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[1] I want to thank Traci Fordham-Hernandez, of the St. Lawrence University Department of Speech and Theater for many conversations about oral communication, largely as we planned SLU's Oral Communication Institute. I also want to acknowledge the critical support that the University received for this initiative from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

[2] Will Kymlicka. 2001. *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism ,Multiculuturalism, and Citizenship*. Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 303.

[3] See Ibid.; Stephen Macedo. 2000. *Democracy and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP ; Rob Reich. 2002. *Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press ; and Amy Gutmann. 1999. *Democratic Education*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP.

[4] Ibid. p. 173.

[5] Robert Putnam. 2003. "APSA Presidential Address: The Public Role of Political Science." *Perspectives on Politics*. 1 (2): 249-55, p. 249.

[6] Italics added. Ibid: p. 249.

more broadly) "to become interested and engaged in politics....the discipline of political science has not simply been apathetic about this question [how do you motivate students?], but has actively resisted our efforts to build into the discipline serious thought and debate about our role as motivator to students to be engaged in politics."[7] Current research on youth political socialization indicates that this is becoming a more central question within the discipline, as well as within interdisciplinary scholarship.

In fact, this work suggests that civic education needs to be conceptualized broadly, encompassing not simply those activities that foster civic engagement, such as volunteerism[8], or those that lead to greater knowledge of the political system, but also those that encourage dialogue about politics and political issues.[9] "For some young people," they note, "schools can open the doors to civic and political life, as well as teach specific civic skills. Individual teachers can play vital roles by encouraging students to engage to talk openly and to debate ideas."[10] I want to suggest that as political science teachers, we need to be concerned with creating classroom environments that ask students to engage in deliberative dialogue in order to help them to better understand their own values, the values of others, and how these may productively come together in a democracy. That is, we must work to create assignments and environments in which students articulate and defend their perspectives in dialogue with their peers or the authors whose work we assign in our classes. In this way we can help students to understand the importance of deliberation for democratic life. In order to better understand the challenges that we confront in creating such spaces, it is useful to draw from the work of and work with scholars in the fields of rhetoric and speech communication. The work that I am doing with oral communication in my government classes has grown out of such a collaboration.

**The Communication Environment and Pedagogy**

In 2001, I was a member of a team that wrote a proposal to work with faculty to develop better pedagogies involving oral communication, largely by creating an Oral Communication Institute that brings faculty together to reflect on the communication environment of our classrooms and to discuss how we can use informal oral communication to enhance learning and communication skills. This proposal grew out a number of local concerns, most of which are, I believe, concerns that the developing scholarship on youth political socialization suggest should be present in all who want to education to foster civic engagement. On the one hand, our efforts to increase oral

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[7] Susan E. Clarke, Pat Hutchings, Scott Keeter, Grant Heeher, Yvette Alex-Assensoh, and Frank Boyd. 2002. "Transcript: Roundtable on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Political Science." *PS.* XXXV (2): 223-28, p. 225.

[8] In this regard, Torney-Pyrta and Amadeo's discussion of how American students understand volunteerism is interesting. They note: "In the United States, political interest is not associated with volunteering in the community. Further, current volunteering is not associated with the likelihood of future voting, suggesting that volunteering is not understood as a political activity from the viewpoint of American youth" (291).

[9] Molly W. Andolino, Krista Jenkins, Cliff Zukin, and Scott Keeter. 2003. "Habits from Home, Lessons from School: Influences on Youth Civic Engagement." *PS.* XXXVI (2): 275-80., p. 278.. See also Judith Torney-Purta and Jo-Ann Amadeo . Ibid. "A Cross-National Analysis of Political and Civic Involvement Among Adolescents.": 269-74, p. .

[10] Molly W. Andolino, Krista Jenkins, Cliff Zukin, and Scott Keeter. Ibid. "Habits from Home, Lessons from School: Influences on Youth Civic Engagement.": 275-80., p. 279.

communication often resulted in faculty assigning greater numbers of formal presentations. Yet such presentations serve a limited purpose in preparing students for their future lives, both broadly and in terms of their citizenship. This is a conclusion with which Andolina et al. agree: "Eight-in-ten high school students have given a speech or oral report, but only half (51%) have taken part in a debate or tried to persuade someone about something and just 38% have written a letter to someone they do not know. Students who have been taught these skills, especially letter writing and debating, are much more likely to be involved in a range of participatory acts inside and outside the school environment, even when other factors are taken into consideration."[11] Ideally, I would suggest, the skills that one learns are critical thinking, rhetoric, and communication skills, all of which combine to allow a student to frame ideas in ways which acknowledge differences of opinion and try to account for why a particular perspective might be a better one. Debate, or other forms of engaged discourse, also require listening. One study suggests that students listen more attentively in classes in elementary school than they do in higher grades; our own data from St. Lawrence suggests that students are particularly prone to not listen to their peers. Thus, they understand listening not as a central communication and thought process, but rather as a means of communicating information that matters.

The research of Carol Trosset at Grinnell perhaps sheds further light on why students who are able to engage in debate are more likely to be civically engaged, though I also want to suggest that debate may in fact not be the preferred mode of engaged discourse. Although it is not clear that the population she studied is representative of college students broadly, even college students at small liberal arts colleges such as St. Lawrence, her research suggests dynamics that were recognizable to our faculty. Further, after spending a few days at St. Lawrence, she did conclude that advocacy dominated student discourse. Given the differences between SLU and Grinnell, this may suggest that this finding is actually fairly typical. First, she notes that the majority of the students whom she studied had an "advocacy view" of discussion. She notes, "Only five out of the 200 students in our sample volunteered a different, more exploratory, view of discussion, such as "I want to talk about multicultural education because I'm not sure I know enough about it," and "I want to discuss race, as it would open my mind to things I don't experience myself.' In exploratory discussion, people who are seeking more information and other viewpoints speak in order to learn about things. This is very different from the advocacy model in which people who have already made up their minds speak in order to express their views and convince others."[12] This also extended to listening, with most students indicating that "they would be most likely to listen to someone with whom that agreed."[13]

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[11] Ibid.: p. 278.
[12] Carol Trosset. 1998. "Obstacles to Open Discussion and Critical Thinking: The Grinnell College Study." *Change*. (September/October): 44-49, p. 46.
[13] Ibid.: p. 46.

This style of communication can be linked to what Deborah Tannen has referred to as an "argument culture."[14] It is this culture that she sees dominating public dialogue in the United States, thus it should not be surprising that many students come to college having internalized many of its assumptions. This is also a culture that Tannen argues is often destructive of dialogue. Central to the argument culture is the idea that all issues have two sides, and that they are so incommensurable that those who support either side can do nothing other than perhaps scream at those with whom they disagree. As Tannen notes, "When you're having an argument with someone, your goal is not to listen and understand. Instead, you use every tactic you can think of—including distorting what your opponent just said—in order to win the argument."[15] She suggests that with many public issues, dialogue, which involves listening, reflecting, and possibly revising one's own perspective would be more fruitful. It also might, she suggests, bring women more into discourse, a finding that again makes sense along side Trosset's finding that women in particular are unwilling to see their perspectives as one's that should be challenged.[16] In general, Tannen argues that many issues require dialogue in order to foster exploration, not in order to determine a winner. Such an environment requires that individuals understand that although their positions may be questioned and agreement may not be possible, understanding better why this is the case can be important.

Tom Shachtman extends Tannen's critique of contemporary culture by focusing out attention on the myriad ways by which public culture fosters not articulateness, which is important for democracy, but inarticulateness. "…inarticulate behavior," he notes, "is being modeled for us by our leaders, including those in politics, entertainment, and in other highly visible positions. From the example of our political leaders, seen on each evenings television news, people learn how not to say what they mean, and that it is acceptable to not mean what they say."[17] Echoing the analysis of Tannen, he suggests that in much of popular culture, "Articulate behavior has been replaced with combativeness."[18] Such an approach to speech can, he argues, be influenced in educational institutions; unfortunately most college students have not developed these skills.[19] "Refusing to ask questions while simultaneously tooting their own horns and not responding to what the other person has to offer—a pattern usually thought of as characteristic only of high school dropouts—has become the style of many mainstream college students today."[20]

Thus, the ability to foster an environment where students develop and practice the skills that are necessary for "public reasonableness" or articulateness requires considerable effort. The idea that classroom interchange is ideally not argument, or even what conventionally might be understood as debate, but dialogue has been developed by other

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[14] See Deborah Tannen. 1999. *The Argument Culture: Stopping America's War of Words*. New York: Ballantine Books.
[15] Ibid. p. 5.
[16] Trosset. "Obstacles to Open Discussion and Critical Thinking: The Grinnell College Study.": 44-49.
[17] Tom Shachtman. 1995. *The Inarticulate Society:Eloquence and Culture in America*. New York: Free Press, p. 6.
[18] Ibid. p. 9.
[19] Ibid. p. 89.
[20] Ibid. p. 90.

educational and speech communication scholars, including some who see Tannen as overly critical of argument, fearing that the tendency to want conversation to be positive can easily lead those who disagree to be silent, a fear that is particularly strong given the desire of colleges and universities to engage in multicultural education. Although I think that this critique is somewhat exaggerated, and take Tannen at her word when she writes that "her goal is not a make-nice false veneer of agreement or a dangerous ignoring of true opposition,"[21] exploring what this does mean for engaged classrooms is not her goal, thus we can learn from those who wish to explore the consequences of dialogue in classrooms where students experience power differences, between both themselves and the faculty and among peer groups.[22] Nicholas Burbules, for example, cautions that discourse needs to be understood not as inherently leading to consensus, but as a process that is a complex interplay of cultural dynamics, identity negotiations, situations, and goals. Although dialogue that does not attempt to achieve consensus can be, and often is, educational. Burbules writes:

> ...the prescriptive account of dialogue has been impeded by the formal, idealized models through which it has been characterized: impeded because these models have often not taken account of the situational, relational, material circumstances in which such discursive practices actually take place. Attending to the social dynamics and contexts of classroom discourse heightens the awareness of the complexities and difficulties of changing specific elements within larger communities of practice. These communities may be the primary shapers of teaching and learning practices, but not always in the way that serve intended or ideal educational objectives; other purposes, such as identity formation or negotiating relations of group solidarity, may predominate. The power of such social purposes may restrict lines of inquiry, distort dialogical interactions, and silence perspectives in ways that conflict with the explicit purposes of education.[23]

Burbules' point is not that we should give up on the educational value of dialogue, but that one needs clear pedagogical goals, ones informed by an understanding of the classroom and institutional context in which we are teaching in order to define the kinds of dialogue that we wish to create and how we wish to organize such dialogues.[24] Garrison and Kimball suggest the use of affinity groups as a strategy that might be used

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[21] Tannen. *The Argument Culture: Stopping America's War of Words*. p.

[22] This is a particularly important consideration at a small, rurally located libera' arts college such as St. Lawrence. Students clearly understand that who they wish to be outside of the classroom has implications for who they are in the classroom. One challenge that faculty members face is trying to understand and work productively with these dynamics.

[23] Nicholas C. Burbules. 2000. "The Limits of Dialogue as a Critical Pedagogy." In *Revolutionary Pedagogies*, edited by Peter Trifonas. NY: Routledge. Available at http://faculty.ed.uiuc.edu/burbules/ncb/papers/limits.html

[24] It is important to point out that both this piece and the essay by Garrison and Kimball that I cite below were written in response to an essay by Elizabeth Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering: Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy," *Harvard Educational Review*, 59(1989): 297-324. In this essay, Ellsworth argues that power operates within classrooms in so many different ways that dialogue as rational engagement is impossible. Burbules' goal is to acknowledge many of Ellsworth's points, but to suggest that we need not give up on dialogue as pedagogical strategy.

in classrooms to mitigate the ways that power dynamics constrain dialogue. "The purpose of affinity groups," they write, "is to provide support by validating each others' experiences. For example, one of the authors is currently involved with a women's group which serves such a purpose. Although the participants vary widely in terms of age, religious belief, occupation, educational background, ethnicity, political affiliation, and so on, our common experience as women allows us to dialogue across our other differences. Each participant knows that her identity as a woman will not be threatened in any way within the group, and this safety makes it easier to risk other aspects of identity. The reinforcement we give and get from each other helps in confrontations in other situations where we do experience disadvantage on the basis of our gender."[25] They suggest that faculty members allow students to determine for themselves what "affinities" are meaningful.

To the extent that we can help students to reflect on the complexities of their dialogues, we may well be enhancing both our own instruction and our students' democratic capacities. At St. Lawrence, my ability to consider the factors that Burbules discusses has been greatly enhanced by serious discussions with other faculty and administrators about the environment in which we work, both as part of the Oral Communication Institute, through our First Year Program's attempt to better acquaint faculty with students as whole human beings through a living/learning program, and by our institutional commitment to recognizing and using the diversity that we have on campus in positive ways. Thus, using a dialogue centered pedagogy, if ones goal is to teach both course content and dialogue as a democratic skill and process, may require significant engagement, both with students and peers in order to better understand the campus cultures in which we operate.

**The Politics of Family: Goals, Assignments, and Results**

Teaching about the politics of family provides an opportunity to take seriously the suggestion of Rogers Smith that the discipline of political science ought to give priority "to helping both disciplinary and general public understandings of important substantive political issues become better informed and reasoned."[26] In particular, this is a course that can help students to better understand the power of rhetoric about the family, explore social science studies of family issues to see how they do or do not support this rhetoric, and help students to understand how this issue influences American politics broadly. Finally, it is an issue about which many students already care, understanding that public policy in this area deeply affects their lives. Because of such concerns, Mona Harrington argues that public conversations about family issues could be central both to enhancing democracy and to developing policy that takes seriously enough the "crisis of care" that Harrington argues has arisen as a result of family policy and politics that does not adequately recognize the costs of care within society. "With respect to the care crisis,"

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[25] James W. Garrison and Stephanie L. Kimball, Dialoguing Across Differences: Three Hidden Barriers," Available at: http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-yearbook/93_docs/Gar_Kimb.HTM

[26] Rogers Smith. 2002. "Should We Make Political science More of a Science or More About Politics?" *PS.* XXXV (2): 199-201., p. 199.

she writes, "the hope is that that a wide range of disparate groups talking *–to each other*—would create a composite picture showing that the crisis affects everyone, though in different ways. And such picture could produce broad-based support for policies that take those differences into account."[27] Although, as the discussion above suggests, Harrington may well place too much trust in the power of dialogue to lead to consensus, such discussions are likely to be central for combating the current rhetoric which assumes that families can, and should, largely meet their own care needs, an assumption that Harrington demonstrates can only be made if issues such as childcare, elder care, and health care, and feminism are seen separately, rather than in an integrated manner. Given that students do care about family and family politics, the course provides an opportunity to begin to involve them in discussions that will, hopefully, carry over into their post-collegiate lives.

The following goals were part of my thinking as I designed and taught *The Politics of Family in America*. Each, as should be clear at this point, is linked to enhancing the democratic skills of students: (1) encouraging students to clarify their own values, a goal which has a number of different components, including considering how one's values are derived from experiences and social discourses, exploring how they are similar to or different from the values of others, coming to an understanding of the values either explicitly part of current political debate or implicit within that debate, considering how policy either reflects or fails to reflect both the student's own values and the dominant public values, considering what policies the student supports and why, and finally, looking at how her/his preferences fit with her/his peers, course authors, and current public policy; (2) helping students gain an increased ability to discuss family issues, whether orally or in writing; (3) helping students to continue to develop critical reading and listening skills. That is, I want them to reflect the views of authors and their peers accurately and to be able to agree with them and/or critique them based on sound reasoning and evidence.

When I initially designed the course, I had co-coordinated two cycles of the Oral Communication Institute. From this, I knew that I wanted students to be engaged in class discussion on a regular basis, but I was not yet sure how exactly this would play out in practice. Having been at St. Lawrence for 15 years and actively involved in a number of campus initiatives, I came into the class with a good sense of the local culture and the constraints to dialogue that exist within the culture. The most important constraint is that what happens in the classroom is never separate from the social life that students create outside the classroom. Thus, seniors come with many consolidated relationships, whether from fraternities and sororities, residential theme cottages, campus organizations, athletic teams, etc. In fact, our institutional research suggests that many of our students form their friendship circles early in their time at St. Lawrence. We also know that although St. Lawrence is a predominantly white institution with students from Christian backgrounds, we have significant class diversity which is often invisible on campus. Finally, we know that unlike many small liberal arts colleges, we continue to have a roughly equal number of male and female students, but that our female students are significantly more liberal

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[27] Mona Harrington. 2000. *Care and Equality: Inventing a new Family Politics*. New York: Routledge, p. 181.

than our male students. I expected, therefore, that students would come to the class with a range of both family experiences and perspectives on family, with the most significant differences revolving around the challenges that changing gender roles present to families and the challenges that economic polarization pose for many families. .

I designed the course to include perspectives on the family from multiple ideological positions, including communitarian, feminist, and feminist/New Democratic.[28] As we began the semester, I realized that with 22 students, most second semester seniors, I had to carefully consider how to structure the class so that students remained engaged and those who were not inclined to speak in large groups were able to participate. The small group discussions that students had early on suggested to me that these would meet both goals, since it was clear that most students who never spoke in the full class were actively engaged in small group work. Because I also wanted students to reflect on their beliefs and try to work with others to negotiate where there were disagreements, I decided to have them work together in groups of 4 or 5 over a 4 week time period to set their own policy priorities. Because my goal for students to explore and discuss their own beliefs, I allowed them to choose their own groups. The virtue of this decision is that I do not believe that there were students who felt silenced within their group. The cost is that students generally chose to remain within the social groups that brought them to the class, whether groups formed in a First Year Program course on family, in particular Greek organizations, through athletics, or because of a commitment to community service. Thus, I sacrificed the potential for more conflictual and challenging group discussions to more active engagement. In a sense, I allowed students to form what were close to alliance groups, with the understanding that they would have to confront other perspectives both through responding to presentations and in writing.

After completing each of the texts that set forth a particular perspective, I asked students, who had already begun to reflect on their values, to meet in their policy group to discuss the author's arguments and, ultimately, to use these discussions to create their own platform. For each meeting, I prepared a set of questions for the students to discuss. These questions generally asked them to carefully consider the author's arguments and how those arguments fit with the group's beliefs and policy preferences. A member of each group took minutes, which were then distributed to both the other group members and to me. This was a way of both holding students accountable and giving me some insight into what they were discussing. For one of the meetings, I created different sets of questions for each group, which enabled me to enter into their dialogue. About 2/3 of the way through the semester, each group presented and discussed their policy proposals and I asked them to write a paper in which they considered both the process and product of their group's work.

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[28]For this section of the course, the texts were: David Popenoe. 1999. *Life Without Father*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP; Judith Stacey. 1996. *In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age*. Boston: Beacon Press; and Harrington. *Care and Equality: Inventing a New Family Politics* . In addition, students viewed a Frontline film on the marriage movement: "Let's Get Married," written and produced by Ben Loeterman and Alex Kotlowitz, aired 11/14/2002. They began the semester by reading Nancy F. Cott. 2000. *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press and Carol Stack. 1997. *All Our Kin*. Westview Press. For a complete syllabus, see http://it.stlawu.edu/~vleh/315.html.

After each discussion, I asked students to briefly write about how the discussion affected their beliefs. Not surprisingly, for the most part their overall values did not radically change, though the process of reading and discussing did lead to students may having more questions that they did initially or understanding reality as more complex, and therefore, not as clear. For example:

> "We had different perspectives on what we should do with the welfare system and I find that I often switch my own perspective. Sometimes I feel the welfare system needs help and other times I want to let it be or get rid of it altogether."
>
> "When speaking specifically of Harrington, I brought up the idea that her ideas have contributed to making our values more complex."
>
> "As a group, we concluded that the reasons for teen mothers to become dependent on welfare occurs for different reasons in different situations. A. noted that it was often not due to poor decisions made by teen mothers but simply lack of opportunities. B. feels that this seems to be the most important issue that our platform of policies should address, our current economic system. C. realized that the only factor that seems to be a proven factor in who receives welfare is those teen mothers with mental illness such as depression and abuse."

Additionally, a number of students began to realize that the political party that they were most likely to identify with, that of their parents, may not support policies that are consistent with their views of family issues. Thus, they became a bit more aware of how their actual values may be reflected politically, and perhaps developed a more personally thought-out framework for political decision-making.

The students were also clearly able to identify key differences between authors and to see these as having political and policy consequences. Such understanding is, I believe, came much more from their conversation than from any instruction that I may have done. For example:

> "A good deal of the discussion [today] compared Popenoe to Stack. Popenoe claims lack of marriage and father figure is the problem. Stack focuses more on poverty and denounces the current economic system. She feels that poverty is the problem and that leads to single parent households."

In general, the students minutes, reflections, and writing indicated to me that they had seriously considered policy issues from health care, to equalizing educational opportunity, to gay marriage, in some detail. Some groups reached a consensus on these issues fairly easily, a consensus that they tended to see as consistent with Harrington's arguments, while others were forced to compromise in ways that that did not fit neatly with any currently existing political perspective. For example, although they may have

taken fairly conservative positions on some issues, virtually all of the students found the idea of abstinence-only sex education to be worthless.

**Further Considerations and Goals for the Future**

Although I was pleased with much of what students accomplished in this course, in terms of gaining an understanding of family issues and talking about them seriously with one another, I ideally would like for them to be more engaged with others, both in terms of who they talk with and how they use the knowledge that they have gained. Students in this class were somewhat reluctant to see the policies that they supported as perhaps an indication of where politicians could lead because they thought that as college students, they were not yet able to fully understand family issues and politics. I am currently building more assignments that ask students to look at the political world through the perspectives of presidential candidates and political organizations, each of which is important for helping students to connect their ideas to real political groups and politicians in order to encourage them to support and work with those with whom they agree. As part of the Fall 2003 course, I am going to give students the opportunity to write a letter to the editor of either a local newspaper or the campus newspaper in support of a political candidate.

Ideally I would also like students to engage in discussion of these issues with people who are neither college students nor members of their families, thus better realizing the goal that Harrington set forth. An obvious way to do this would be to require that they engage in dialogue with members of the local community. Many of the students in my class had completed service-learning in the community, whether through the University's Service Learning course or through volunteer work in the community. Yet I sensed from what they said about these experiences in class that they get to know local residents not as people with whom to engage in dialogue about important public issues, but as clients. My goal over the course of the next year is to try to build a dialogue component into the course that would bring students into discussion with local people. In part, this will build on a desire of the University to rebuild our service learning program as a community-based learning program and a grant that St. Lawrence has recently received from the Association of American Colleges and Universities, a grant that will build dialogue groups of students and community members to talk about a variety of local issues. As part of this grant, a number of students and faculty members will receive training in "sustained dialogue," an approach that Franklin Pierce College has built into both its community relations work and its coursework. As this suggests, the ability to carry out this part of the project requires that I receive the training necessary to help my students to complete such an assignment successfully. It is, again, an indication of the need to work across disciplinary boundaries to enhance one's skills before demanding that students do the same.

Finally, in the Spring 2003 semester I did not ask students to discuss the dynamics in their groups in class. As a result, the fact that gender dynamics played a significant role in those groups that were composed of both men and women was never a subject of discussion in the class. My hesitance to bring this issue to the class as a whole stemmed from the fact that I saw gender as a powerful force in how students responded to the

various authors early on. I feared, though, that students, particularly male students, would simply see my bringing this up as another attempt to force them to think about gender issues. It was not until we had completed the first two-thirds of the course and I read students written reflections that I realized that they understood that gender divided them. At this point, we had moved on to new material and talking as a class about why gender was such a critical factor in some groups seemed too disconnected. Thus, I think that my hesitation resulted in a lost opportunity to discuss the similarity between the students' experience and much public discourse/opinion on family issues and to discuss whether the ways that they overcame the gender differences in their groups have anything to teach the broader society. More broadly, I need to give more class time to reflecting on and discussing dialogue in American society so that students understand its power, its challenges, and its centrality to democratic citizenship.

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